

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4120

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 4201

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PA

SUBJECT: HUNGER STRIKE UPDATE

REF: ASUNCION 4178

1. CHARGE DISCUSSED ISSUE LATE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON, WITH ACTING PAPAL NUNCIO, MONSIGNOR GATTI, WHO PROVIDED SOME BACKGROUND ON VIEWS OF PARAGUAYAN HIERARCHY AND INTER-FAITH CHURCH COMMITTEE. AS DEPARTMENT MAY RECALL, ASUNCION 2469 DESCRIBED ACTIVE ROLE PLAYED BY ARCHBISHOP ROLON DURING EARLIER HUNGER STRIKE IN JUNE WHEN HE HELPED MEDIATE BETWEEN STRIKERS AND INTERIOR MINISTER MONTANARO. ACCORDING TO MONS. GATTI, THE ARCHBISHOP BELIEVES THE PRESENT HUNGER STRIKE IS AMISTAKE AND, ALTHOUGH HE IS DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER THE SURVIAVAL OF THE HUELGISTAS, HE WILL NOT TRY TO MEDIATE BECAUSE HE IS AWARE OF PRESIDENT STROESSNER'S ORDER THAT NO COMPROMISE IS TO BE MADE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WHILE THE STRIKE CONTINUES. THE CHURCH COMMITTEE IS ALSO DEEPLY CONCERNED, HE SAID, BUT DOES NOT WANT TO PROVOKE A NEGATIVE RESPONSE BY TAKING A PUBLIC STAND.

2. SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF, MONS. GATTI SAID THE STRIKE IS BEING MANUPULATED IN A REALLY DISGRACEFUL FASHION, NOT TO OBTAIN RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS, WHO WERE ALL TO BE RELEASED ON AUGUST 15 IN HONOR OF STROESSNER'S INAUGURATION, BUT TO
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UNDERMINE HIS REGIME HERE AND ABROAD. IT WAS WELL KNOWN, ACCORDING TO HIM, THAT STROESSNER PLANNED TO CLOSE EMBOSCADA PRISON AND SET ALL THE POLITICAL PRISONERS FREE ON AUGUST 15; THAT IS WHY THE POLITICAL DIRECTORS CALLED THE STRIKE FOR AUGUST 11. THEY CARE LITTLE ABOUT THE LIVES OR FREEDOM OF THE PRISONERS BUT ONLY ABOUT GETTING STROESSNER OUT; THEY WOULD NOT BE SORRY TO SEE A PRISONER DIE AND THUS FURNISH A MARTYR

TO THE CAUSE. HE RECOGNIZED THAT THESE WERE STRONG CHARGES TO MAKE AGAINST PEOPLE WHO ARE CONVINCED OF THEIR HUMANITARIAN AIMS (AND WHO HE REFUSED TO IDENTIFY BY NAME) BUT SAID THEY ARE SO SWEEPED UP IN ENMITY TO THE SYSTEM THAT THEY SEIZE ON ANY WEAPON TO ATTACK IT. THE RELEASE OF ALL THE POLITICAL PRISONERS AS AN ACT OF MUNIFICENCE BY STROESSNER WOULD NOT ONLY DO CREDIT TO THE REGIME BUT REMOVE A KEY WEAPON FROM THEIR ARSENAL; HENCE THE ILL-TIMED HUNGER STRIKE, WHICH IN FACT WAS INTENDED TO PUT STROESSNER IN A CORNER. HE WILL NOT YIELD TO THE STRIKE BECAUSE IT WOULD WEAKEN HIS AUTHORITY OVER THE PARTY AND THE ARMY; HIS REPUTATION ABROAD COULD HARDLY BE WORSE SO THE DEATH OF ONE HUELGISTA DOES NOT WORRY HIM.

3. IN FACT, MONS. GATTI SAID, HIS INFORMATION WAS THAT NO ONE WAS NEAR DEATH, DESPITE THE FACT THE STRIKE HAD GONE ON FOR 45 DAYS, BECAUSE THE HUELGISTAS ARE TAKING LIQUID NOURISHMENT. THE POLICE DOCTORS ARE UNDER ORDERS TO "KEEP THEM ALIVE BY ANY MEANS" AND THE WEAKEST CASES ARE TAKEN TO THE POLICE CLINIC WHERE THEY ARE FED INTRAVENOUSLY. HE HOPED THE STRIKE WOULD BE CALLED OFF SOON BUT SAID, SINCE THE INCIDENT OF THE SIT-IN AT THE NUNCIATURA, NEITHER THE HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES NOR THE PRISONERS' FAMILIES HAVE SOUGHT HIS ADVICE. (SEE ASUNCION 3771 AND 3795).

4. COMMENT: MONS. GATTI IS RATHER BITTER OVER THE SIT-IN AND THE NUNCIO, WHO LEFT LAST WEEK FOR A TWO-MONTH VACATION
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IN EUROPE, IS NOW ON QUITE BAD TERMS WITH CARMEN DE LARA CASTRO, THE VENEZUELAN AND GERMAN AMBASSADORS AND OTHERS WHO FEEL HE WAS WRONG TO EXPEL THE HUELGISTAS' RELATIVES FROM THE NUNCIATURA. MONS. GATTI IS CONVINCED THAT THE "POLITICAL MANIPULATORS" BEHIND THE HUNGER STRIKE ARE TRYING TO USE THE CHURCH TO ATTACK STROESSNER AND THAT THEY PUT THE FAMILIES OF THE PRISONERS UP TO THE SIT-IN HOPING FOR A POLICE DONNYBROOK IN THE NUNCIATURA. ACCORDING TO HIM, THE POLICE WERE ONLY TOO WILLING TO ACCOMMODATE AND PAPPALARDO TOLD THE NUNCIO UNLESS THE FAMILIES WERE OUT BY MIDNIGHT HE WOULD SEND A DETAIL FROM THE LOCAL POLICE STATION TO DRAG THEM OUT AND BOOK THEM ON CHARGES OF TRESPASS. THE NUNCIO AND MONS. GATTI FELT THEY HAD WORKED OUT A GOOD COMPROMISE, ACCOMPANYING THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO A CATHOLIC CLINIC AND SECURING A GOVERNMENT PLEDGE OF NO REPRISALS, BUT WERE OFFENDED WHEN THE OPPOSITION POLITICIANS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES DENOUNCED THEM FOR LACK OF HUMANITARIAN CONCERN. THEY FEEL BADLY USED, WHICH PROBABLY EXPLAINS MONS. GATTI'S HARSH ACCUSATION THAT THE STRIKE ORGANIZERS WOULD NOT BE AT ALL SORRY TO SEE SOMEONE DIE FOR THE CAUSE.
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